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III.—*The Hairy Men of Yesso.* By W. MARTIN WOOD, ESQ.

[*Read December 27th, 1864.*]

It may seem a thankless task to describe a people whose race is evidently doomed to extinction. It generally happens also, that in the isolated residue of any declining race, its repulsive peculiarities become more strongly marked. Some effort of humane feeling is required in such cases, in order to recognise those traits in virtue of which the perishing fraction may claim its kinship with the great family of mankind. Such an outcast race yet lingers in the island of Yesso, the most northern portion of the empire of Japan. These aborigines are named "Aïnos", or "Mosinos"—the "all-hairy people", this last being a Japanese term which marks their chief physical peculiarity. Their number is estimated at about fifty thousand.

Yesso is only separated from Nippon by the narrow straits of Tsougar; but the climate of the island is unpropitious and its soil is barren, so that the Japanese have only occupied the southern portion. They number about a hundred thousand, and dwell principally in the cities of Mats-mai and Hakodadi. The former city is the residence of the feudatory prince who holds Yesso under fealty to the Tycoon of Yeddo. To this prince of Mats-mai the Aïnos send a deputation every spring, who present a tribute of dried fish and furs, and do homage and repeat a formal convention expressive of submission to the Japanese. Hakodadi is the largest city of Yesso, and is the third Japanese port opened to foreign commerce. Its roadstead and harbour are the safest and most commodious of any in the eastern seas. It affords an excellent port for the refitting of merchant vessels, especially for the American whalers; and it also forms a good rendezvous for the naval vessels of the various trading powers. From a temple in the centre of the city float the flags of England and France, and there the consuls of those powers reside; the American consul is located near them. The Russians have chosen a more isolated position at the outside of the city; but they occupy a much larger space than the other powers, and have a much more extensive staff.

The Aïnos live quite in the interior of the island, and seldom show themselves at Hakodadi or Mats-mai, except when on their embassy in spring or in autumn, when they come to exchange their dried fish and furs for rice and hunting gear. Of a timid and shrinking deportment, these people seem utterly crushed in spirit by their long subjection and isolation. They are short in stature, of thick-set figure and clumsy in their movements. Their physi-

cal strength is considerable ; but, besides that peculiarity, there would seem to be nothing by which an observer can recognise the possibility of the Aïnos ever having possessed any military virtue. The uncouthness and wildness of their aspect is calculated at first to strike a stranger with dismay or repugnance. Esau himself could not have been a more hairy man than are these Aïnos. The hair on their heads forms an enormous bush, and it is thick and matted. Their beards are very thick and long, and the greater part of their face is covered with hair which is generally dark in colour ; but they have prominent foreheads and mild dark eyes, which somewhat relieve the savage aspect of their visage. Their hands and arms, and, indeed, the greater part of their bodies, are covered with an abnormal profusion of hair. The natural colour of their skins is somewhat paler than that of the Japanese, but it is bronzed by their constant exposure. The women of the Aïnos, as if in default of the extraordinary endowments of their spouses, have a custom of staining their faces with dark blue for a considerable space around their mouths. Their children they generally carry in a very singular fashion over their shoulders ; and during a journey these tender charges are placed in a net and slung over the backs of their mothers. The children are lively and intelligent when little, but soon acquire the downcast aspect of their elders.

Yet these strange people have a history, and though its details are lost, they cherish the remembrance that their forefathers were once the equals, if not the masters of the Japanese. This is supposed to have been in the sixth century before Christ, at a period coeval with the reign of the first Mikado of Japan. The Aïnos were then masters of the northern provinces of Nippon, but they appear to have been dispossessed of their land by the Japanese, and then were gradually driven across the strait of Tsougar into Yesso. Their final subjection was not accomplished until the close of the fourteenth century, when they were completely overcome by a Japanese general, and compelled to render tribute at Yeddo. As named above, this ceremony is now performed at Mats-mai ; and a considerable revenue of fish and skins is collected from the Aïnos by Japanese officials in Yesso.

As to the origin of the Aïnos, we believe the whole college of ethnologists are at fault. Geographically considered, Yesso would seem to belong more to the Kurile islands than to Japan ; and the short stature of the Aïnos, together with their ordinary methods of hunting and fishing, remind one of the Kamschatkans. Yet those tribes have none of that superabundance of hair which, being so striking a peculiarity of the Aïnos, would be participated in, to some noticeable degree, by any race having affinity to them. Then, the chief objection to a northern origin for the Aïnos is, that

they persist in cherishing the tradition that their ancestors came from the West; that is, from some place in the direction of the Asiatic continent. Yet no tribe now found in Corea or Mantchouria bears any resemblance to the Aïnos. The interior of Asia, at least all the borders of Tartary and Siberia, have been explored by M. Huc, Mr. Fleming, and Mr. Atkinson, and as yet no hairy people have there been found.*

The language of this outcast race affords no clue to their origin; for there seems no known tongue—certainly none of eastern Asia—which has affinity to theirs. They have no written characters, but have had their rude bards or sagas who, in verses orally transmitted, have kept alive the memory of their ancient heroes and their exploits on mountain and flood. The world will not quite lose these wild strains; for a French missionary, the Abbé Mermet, is preparing a translation of them. The language itself has already been collected, thanks to the perseverance of a Japanese official, who has compiled a glossary of the Aïnos tongue rendered into his own. This zealous linguist deserves to have his name recorded, and it is a sufficiently remarkable one, being—*Jashero-tsona-notske*. Possibly the Aïnos tongue may have in it some valuable hints for professors of mnemonics. One of its chief characteristics appears to be a clumsy principle of repetition. Thus, the numerals are compound, and carry one syllable all through, as—*chena-ppou*, one; *tso-ppou*, two; *re-ppou*, three; *eunes-ppou*, four; *askina-ppou*, five; and so on. Their name for the sun is *baikrets-housoup*, and for the moon *konnats-housoup*; for water, they have *bâ*, and for hand *tekke*. Probably, the European public may shortly receive from the Abbé Mermet a translation of the Aïnos-Japanese dictionary. It is some evidence of the former influence of the Aïnos in Nippon, that the Japanese have adapted several of their Aïnos words into the spoken language of Japan.

The rude mythology of the Aïnos is connected on some obscure principle with the animals of the chase and the monsters of the deep. The bear is their chief divinity, although they slay that animal whenever they can accomplish such a feat. In the process of dissecting the carcass, they endeavour to conciliate the deity whose representative they have slain, by making elaborate obeisances and deprecatory salutations. The head they always reserve, and place it outside their habitations as a sure protection against misfortune. From the Japanese they have adopted some few Bhuddist notions, but their native theology mainly belongs to the class of *fetiché* worship.

* But the people of the Kurile islands are a hairy race, like the Aïnos, although the author seems unaware of this fact. EDITOR.

All tribes of men have some tradition of the origin of the race. That held by the Aïnos is exceedingly curious, both in its points of divergence from, and resemblance to, similar legends of other aborigines. Their story places a woman as the first of their race, and she came, as they say, from the west. This was soon after the world was formed out of the waters, which is the genesis taught in their cosmogony. The Aïnos know of no land except islands; so that really this might be the form which tradition has taken, since that remote period when the isles of Japan and the Kuriles were forced up, as they appear to have been, by volcanic action from the ocean bed. The Aïnos tell how this woman, the first of their race, floated over the waves in a vessel which was freighted with bows and lances, with nets and lines, and all things necessary for the chase and fishing. She landed on an island where was a beautiful garden, and in it she dwelt alone and happily for a long period of years. "That garden still exists," say they, "but no living man has yet been able to find it." The close of this reign of single-blessedness, so long enjoyed by this the first of the Amazons, was brought about by a singular circumstance, which, however, can scarcely be narrated here. There is not, as in most legends, the record of a broken commandment, though transgression of some kind is implied; the change being connected with the loss of the garden and the increase and dispersion of the race. These events followed after the advent of a self-imposed protector whom the lady of the isle had, in a period of weariness, permitted to enter and share her solitude.*

When the Aïnos are visited at their own homes, they are free from that excessive bashfulness which they exhibit in presence of their Japanese masters. They are extremely hospitable, and are even eager to place at the disposal of their visitors all their little stock of provisions, their dried fish and furs. This real kindness on their part is not only a sufficient contrast to their roughness of exterior, but it attracts the attention of the observant traveller, when he also notices the physical strength of his hosts and the evidences of their prowess in the chase. Besides the implements and spoils of hunting and fishing, there is little wealth of any kind in their habitations. The disposition for accumulation is one that

* "Un jour, en revenant de la chasse, elle se sentit fatiguée, et pour se délasser elle alla se baigner dans la rivière qui séparait ses domaines du reste du monde. Soudain elle aperçut un *chien* qui nageait vers elle avec rapidité. Effrayée, elle sortit de l'eau et se cacha derrière un arbre. L'animal la suivit et lui demanda pourquoi elle s'était enfuie: elle répondit qu'elle avait eu peur. 'Laisse-moi rester auprès de toi, dit alors le chien, je serai ton compagnon, ton protecteur, et tu ne craindras plus rien.' Elle y consentit, et *de l'union de ces deux créatures* naquirent les Aïnos, c'est à dire les *hommes*."

is sure to be lost by a declining race ; and any surplus of fish and furs which the Aïnos gather appears to be absorbed by their tribute to their Japanese masters. It is those articles which are recognised by the Aïnos as wealth, for of such consists the dowry which is brought by their brides on entering their new abode.

Some writers have drawn unfavourable conclusions as to the social morality of the Aïnos, from their practice of living in groups of several families. This, however, arises from their former system of patriarchal government ; which, though now retaining some moral influence, has been superseded in penal matters by the authority of the Japanese. The Aïnos formerly were monogamists ; but now, when their resources admit of it, they imitate the Japanese practice of polygamy. In their marriage ceremonies they also imitate those of their conquerors. Like most other degenerate races, the Aïnos have acquired a taste for tobacco and alcoholic drinks ; of the latter, they use *sak-ki*, an intoxicating draught made from rice.

The question suggests itself—What can the future have in store for this strange people ? Their physical strength, which is considerable, might be applied to some agricultural labour suitable to the soil of Yesso ; and their generous disposition would imply a capability for their efforts being guided and directed. Yet, under the depressing influence of Japanese subjection, they seem to have lost all desire for progress of any kind. If, as seems likely, the Japanese polity should become disorganised, the Aïnos might, in the commotion, be roused to some new efforts on their own behalf. Should some new branch of industry be found for them, then perhaps the continuance of this singular race might be secured for a few generations longer than their present prospects seem to promise.
